

## THE INFLUENCE OF GENDER AND FAMILY IN ONLINE PARTICIPATION OF TEENAGERS AT SOCIAL RISK

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**Abstract.** Internet is a mean of mass information and fulfills the traditional functions of a public space without doubts. Participation in the virtual space is defined as a problematic use of the Internet process which damages the disadvantaged young person's personality, which is already characterized by a lack of social skills, communication, feelings of expression issues. The majority of young people are attracted by internet space, by its anonymity and availability. The aim of the research is to analyze the influence of gender and family aspects in online participation of teenagers at social risk. The research showed that the internet provides the great and additional opportunities to teenagers at social risk, something they don't get in their families. Children living with grandparents or with only one parent are more active users of Internet social networks in comparison with other children. They seldom recognize the Internet dangers and more quickly become emotionally dependent on the Internet. The adults' control or its absence determines the expression and frequency of online participation of teenagers at social risk. The girls more frequently recognize the dangers of virtual space than the boys do; but the girls use to publish more information about themselves. The research results show that the participation of teenagers at social risk in social networks is unconscious. Young people are not able to "filter" and select proper information, usually equate the virtual world with reality. Online participation of teenagers is reasoned by satisfaction of needs, parents' inattention and search for new acquaintances.

**Keywords:** children at social risk, gender, online participation, social work, self-awareness.

### Introduction

Recently the internet has become a part of children and youth's everyday life. It was noticed that young people transfer eagerly the communication with their friends to virtual space, this can stimulate the appearance of dependence on social networks. Lithuanian teens use the Internet more frequently than in Europe. Even 95% Lithuanian's 16 years-old use the internet at least once a week, to actively communicate with the Internet social networks, many have their own personal social profile (Livingstone & Ólafsson, 2011).

The authors Wells and Mitchell (2008) noticed that the teenagers at social risk are inclined to overuse the Internet and social networks in comparison with

their age-mates. These teenagers are easily involved into virtual space due to emotional, psychological and social problems.

Social networks influence negatively shut-in personalities, socially shy children and young people who inadequately accept and evaluate the experiences offered by a virtual space (Auer, 2013). The research conducted by Klanienė and Jokūbaitienė (2012) revealed that excessive use of the Internet is typical for the teenagers at social risk. Such excessive use is expressed in the problems of time control. The fact that the teenagers at social risk are inclined to use the Internet more often was also defined by the authors Wells and Mitchell (2008). Mačėnaitė et. al. (2011) analyzed the protection of children's privacy in the Internet. Fraser and Dutta (2010) wrote about the power of social networks. They revealed a new phenomenon – “competition in collecting friends”. In such a way a person seeks for recognition, status, influence and power not only in a real world, but also in a virtual one. The danger of social networks to children and youth was discussed by Glenny (2012). Ruškus et al. (2009) studied teenagers' behavior in the electronic space. The rapid widespread of electronic abuse and its prevention were reviewed by Mažionienė, et al. (2012). They noted that the consequences of online harassment are usually more complicated than the consequences of abuse in real life, because it spreads more rapidly and is difficult to control.

Young people, who are less satisfied with their lives, use the Internet as a communication environment in which they feel more self-confident, with particular emphasis on anonymous communication capabilities (Livingstone, Helsper, 2008). Teenagers who have weak relationship with parents, peers will likely look for opportunities to communicate on the Internet more (Christofides, Muise, Desmarais, 2012). Teen vulnerability in the Internet space differs by gender. Teenagers, especially girls, more likely engage in online social networks activities (Lenhart, 2009; Ruškus, Žvirdauskas, Kačėnauskaitė et al., 2009), meanwhile, boys are more likely engage in computer games, gambling, video accesses websites (Lenhart, 2009).

**The aim of the research** is to analyze the influence of gender and family aspects in online participation of teenagers at social risk.

**Methods of the research:**

Method of quantitative research. The method of partially structured questions was selected in order to reveal peculiarities and expression of online participation of teenagers at social risk. The questionnaires were given to teenagers at social risk (grades 6-10). The research results were processed with Statistical Package for Social Sciences 22.0, with the help of which the statistical and comparative data analyses were applied:

- a. The methods of descriptive statistics: average of frequencies, standard deviation

- b. Spearman correlation analysis
- c. Reliability Analysis

The study included 101 the children at social risk, most of the sample consists of 59 girls (58.4%) and 42 boys (41.6%), attending the 6th -10th grade pupils. All respondents are students who study high school - 69.3%, secondary - 15.8% and 14.9% of the school progymnasium. The study involved the city of Siauliai and Siauliai district children who attend children's day centers and learners of Siauliai and Mazeikiai district schools in disadvantaged pupils. 55.4% of them live in the village or town, 32.7% - in the big city and 11.9% - in the city.

Most of the teens are high school students who already have a common life experience and knowledge, can self-assess what is good and what is not. So mostly teenagers participated in the survey is an eight (27.7%), 22.8% for the nine is far less of the youngest respondents, ie, sixth-graders - 21.8%, tenth consists of 17.8%, and at least 9.9% - of seventh.

Research statements to measure the composition of informants' family (Figure 1).

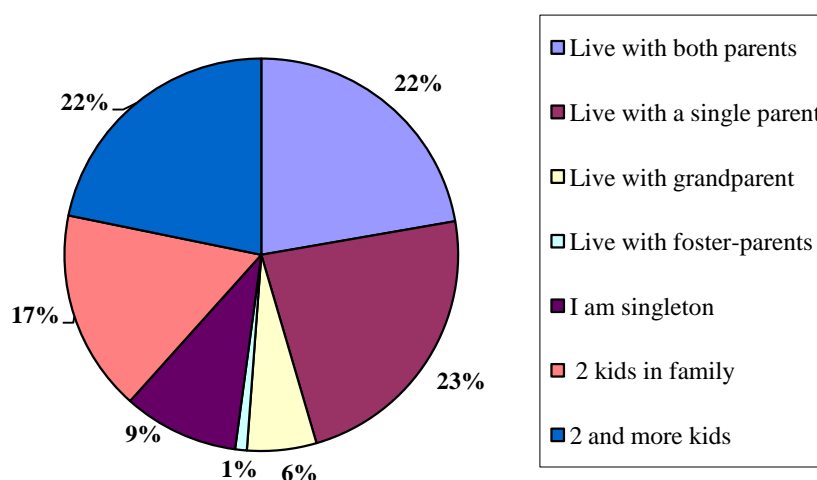


Figure 1 **Family composition, %**

It is expected that the situation of the family will allow to find essential differences in their participation in social networks, and to find the cause of problematic Internet use. As can be seen, most of the informants lives with a single parent (23%) and in a family where there are more than two children (22%). These results confirm the consistent trend in society that social risk family - it's the large, single-parent households. This is one of the risk factors affecting the engagement of teenagers participation in the online space.

## Results

The family is the primary social factor influencing adolescent and attitudes formation. Internet usage frequency, duration and risk incurred closely related to various family characteristics. In this case, it is essential to seek for harmonious family and child relationship. Often happens that children discover the desired communication due to the fact that parents can not or are unable to devote enough attention to their children. For this reason, children tend to look for other ways of getting attention, in this case, attention can be found on the Internet. The results revealed the reasons for disadvantaged teenagers in the presence of online social networks, as far as family status affects their objectives in social networks (see. Table 1)

Table 1 **Spearman correlation according family status**

<b>Proposition</b>		live with both parents	live with only one parent	live with grandparents	live with foster parents	one kid in the family	2 children in the family	more than 2 children
A4 Find yourself a couple	r			<b>0,247</b>	0,221			
	p			<b>0,01</b>	0,02			
A5 Comment	r			<b>0,312</b>				
	p			<b>0,00</b>				
A7 Write messages on the wall	r			<b>0,205</b>				
	p			<b>0,00</b>				
A9 Monitor newsletter	r	-0,215		<b>0,199</b>				
	p	0,03		<b>0,04</b>				
A10 Relax	r		<b>0,219</b>		-0,207			
	p		0,02		0,03			
A11 Play games	r			<b>0,211</b>	-0,215			
	p			<b>0,03</b>	0,03			
A12.Distribute advertising	r					-0,208		
	p					0,03		

It is obvious that children who live with their grandparents ( $r=0.247$ ) are relatively more likely find themselves participating online as also teenagers living with parents ( $r=0.221$ ). Teens who live with their grandparents also are more likely to comment ( $r=0.312$ ), post messages on the wall ( $r=0.205$ ). It is noted that teens living in a family with both parents ( $r=-0.215$ ) monitors the frequency of updates to social networks than those living with their grandparents ( $r=0.199$ ). Social networks as a way of relaxation to name more often

adolescents living with one parent ( $r=0.219$ ) than those living with guardians ( $r=-0.207$ ).

It is clear that family status has an impact on teen participation in social networks motives. Teens who live with grandparents or with one parent are more likely to participate actively online, as the grandparents often lack the knowledge and competencies of modern technology, so they are not interested and do not know what their grandchildren are doing online. As well as children living with one parent, who is usually the only breadwinner, due to time constraints, employment, possibly due to the low technological excellence, devote less time to children, their leisure, free time control. As can be seen, adult control or lack of it affects teen participation in social networks motives, their frequency. This clearly shows that the parents' physical and psychological closeness reduce potential threats to becoming victims of online pairs and harmful use of the Internet.

The assessment of social risk teen awareness about the threats are analyzed separately by gender and family status (Table 2)

Table 2 **Internet use self-perception of potential threats, the risk according to family status (Spearman correalation)**

<b>Proposition</b>		live with bouth parents	live with only one parent	live with grandpar ents	live with foster parents	one kid in the family	2 children in the family	more than 2 children
B1 Personal data made available	r			<b>-0,251</b>		-,0243		
	p			<b>0,01</b>		0,01		
B5 Photo publicity	r							<b>0,279</b>
	p							<b>0,00</b>
B6 Threats	r						-0,202	<b>0,220</b>
	p						0,04	<b>0,02</b>
B7Cyberbullying, harassment	r		<b>-0,206</b>					
	p		<b>0,03</b>					
B8 Sexual harassment	r						-0,202	<b>0,270</b>
	p						0,04	<b>0,00</b>
B10 Meetings with strangers	r							<b>0,203</b>
	p							<b>0,04</b>
B11 Violent scenes	r							<b>0,200</b>
	p							<b>0,04</b>

Thus, family status, the composition also influences teen awareness in recognizing potential threats to social networks. Teenagers living with grandparents ( $r=-0.251$ ), and one child in the family ( $r=-0.243$ ) personal data publicity ( $p=0.01$ ) tend to be seen as less dangerous. Children who have more

than one brother or sister (large family  $r=0.279$ ) publicity pictures seen ( $p=0.00$ ) as a potential danger. Also, these children ( $r=-0.202$ ) more threats on social networks sees as a dangerous than two children in the family ( $r=0.220$ ). Other dangers that adolescents perceived less dangerous, ie electronic bullying, harassment seems less dangerous for those, who live with one parent, and sexual harassment also seems more harmless for children, who has two or more siblings in the family ( $r=0.202$ ) than large families ( $M=0.270$ ). Violent scenes and encounters with stranger seem dangerous for large families.

So the teenagers more or less recognize the danger of the Internet. It is noted that children growing up among two or more siblings often sees the Internet at risk than other children who live without siblings. It is likely that their awareness is constructed by the experience of older siblings, that helps other children to be more vigilant and protect themselves from the dangers on the Internet.

Emotions, which are experienced, while the young people are being „online” is illustrated by the results (Table 3).

These results highlight the importance of the role of adult control, children who live with both parents and/or guardians tend to adequately assess the benefits of social networking, they are not dependent on the Internet, possibly related to the increased free time, increased use of parental control. Children living with their grandparents are usually not controlled, they are free of restrictions on the activities at home. These children ( $r=0.245$ ) more often evaluate other social networks as a good way of spending leisure time ( $p=0.01$ ), a virtual world for them ( $r=0.319$ ) is cuter than actual ( $p=0.00$ ). Respondents say, that online social networks are fashion because all their friends are interested in them ( $p=0.03$ ). Again it is highlighted the need to be recognized, to be a member of the group. They also describe being online as improvement of their mood, the tool to forget the problems, relax ( $r=0.329$ ) and ( $r=0.205$ ).

Adolescence significantly increase frequency of risky and reckless behavior, vivid sensation of ambition in this period of age teenagers often choose the patchwork, and varying emotions obeying behavior (Žukauskienė, 2012).

Study EU Kids Online (Livingstone and Ólafsson, 2008), the children's exposure to online risks incidence is also associated with their age: 14% of 9-10 year olds have encountered one or more risks, 11-12 years of age group, risk increased to 33%, 13-14 age group - 49% and 15-16 age group - by 63% of the risks. Lekavičienė, R. Almonaitienė J., Antininė D., (2010) emphasizes that the most active virtual communication participants are teenagers and young people under 25 years of age.

**Table 3 Social risk adolescent emotional state at the „online” by family status  
(Spearman correlation)**

Teiginys		live with both parents	live with only one parent	live with grandparents	live with foster parents	one kid in the family	2 children in the family	more than 2 children
C1 Social networking sites, it's a great pastime	r			<b>0,245</b>	-0,240		<b>0,210</b>	
	p			<b>0,01</b>	0,01		<b>0,03</b>	
C2 The virtual world is nicer to me than real	r			<b>0,319</b>				
	p			<b>0,00</b>				
C3 Social networking is a necessity for me	r						<b>0,275</b>	
	p						<b>0,00</b>	
C4 Social networks are a fashion, because all her friends use them	r			<b>0,213</b>				
	p			<b>0,03</b>				
C5 Join the social network improves mood, problems left behind, relax	r	-0,214	<b>0,205</b>	<b>0,329</b>	-0,213			
	p	0,03	<b>0,04</b>	<b>0,00</b>	0,03			
C6 Unable to connect to the social network, I feel lonely	r						-0,239	
	p						0,01	

### **Internet use self-perception of potential threats, the risk of gender**

In terms of gender, research showed the following differences: the girls are relatively more underlying the danger in cyberspace. Girls are underlying the danger of electronic bullying, harassment (M=2.61), sexual harassment (M=2.64), erotic and pornographic photos page links (M=2.58), meetings with strangers people (M=2.54), and the violent scenes often are seen more

dangerous than for the ( $M=2.66$ ) boys. It can be seen that for the boys it is harder to understand and recognize potential dangers in the Internet.

One of the ways to combat the dangers of social networking is to protect your personal data provided. Pupils were asked about what personal data they publish online in social networks. Thus, two-thirds (64%) of teens say that they do not provide personal information about themselves in social networking sites. However, the results of analysis shows their assertion to publish personal information about themselves (see. Fig. 2).

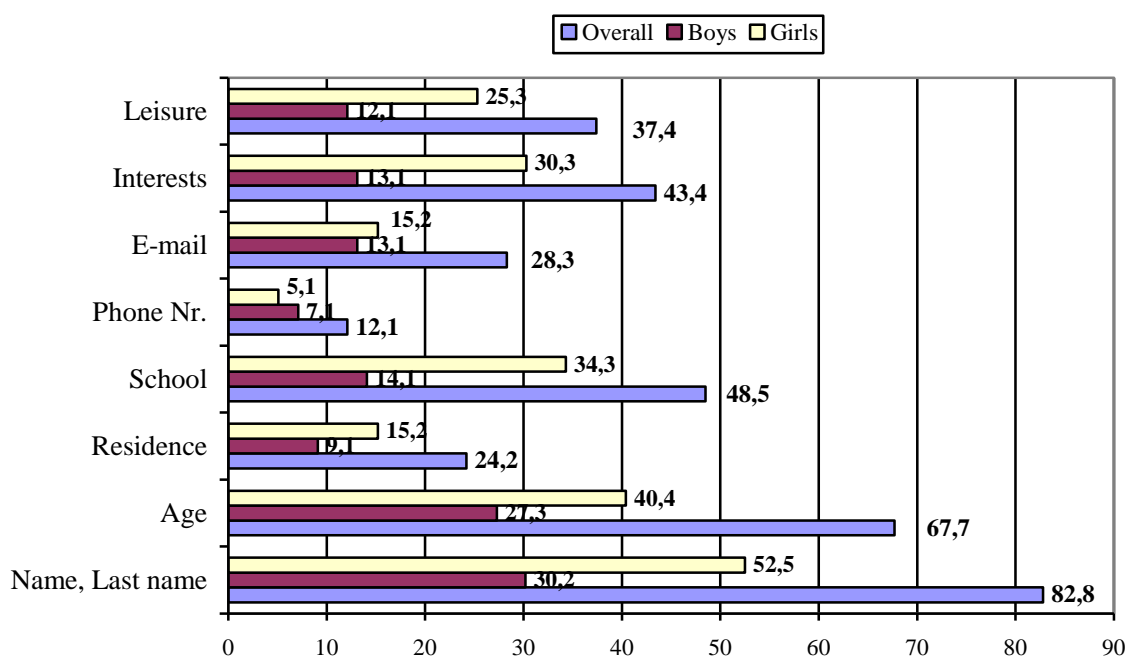


Fig.2 Personal information in the social profile, %

It can be concluded that teens do not realize what is personal information. Most of the teenagers usually indicate their name and surname (82.8% of all respondents, of which 52.5% girls, 30.2% - males), age (67.7%, girls - 40.4%, male - 27.3%), educational institution (48.5%), leisure (37.4%). Teens also do not avoid the specified phone number (12.1%), and place of residence (24.2%). This is in line with Курченко, Кочарян (2011) survey results that 46% of children aged 10-17, social networking profile indicates a personal phone number, 36% - home address.

Girls tend to give more information about themselves than boys. This can result in their desire to make new friends, love, without thinking about the risks. In assessing the significance by gender showed that girls ( $M=0.90$ ) more often indicate real name and surname in social profiles ( $p=0.03$ ) and boys ( $M=0.58$ ) educational institution ( $p=0.03$ ). In assessing the significance of the correlation



by family status revealed that children living in nuclear families ( $r=-0.200$ ) rarely provide personal information comparing to two and more children of the family ( $r=0.224$ ). Children living with both parents ( $r=-0.213$ ) rarely identify their place of residence or living with a single parent ( $r=0.224$ ). But teenagers behave unlike recommends Mačėnaitė et al. (2011), that the Internet should be kept to a minimum publish your personal information. Rough handling of the children themselves tell a lot of personal information, and even to entire strangers. Wells and Mitchell (2008) study revealed that 65%. disadvantaged teenagers provide personal information online and 40%. teens are sending information about themselves to other people. Kneidinger (2010) found that 75% of teenagers share information about hobbies, or other active operations, 66% publicize their pictures or videos of themselves.

Regardless of gender, it is clear that social risk children lack the knowledge, understanding what is personal information, what and how much you can reveal about yourself to others.

## Conclusions

Participation in the virtual space is defined as a problematic use of the Internet process which damages the disadvantaged young person's personality, which is already characterized by a lack of social skills, communication, feelings of expression issues. It is therefore very important for that to be developed and applied in an effective safe use of the Internet model of working with this group of teenagers. It is likely that a very effective tool to teens organizing debates on various web topics. One thing is clear that no prohibited or moralizing measures will help a better understanding of Internet threats. Disadvantaged adolescent participation in social networks, competence development becomes the object of social work.

Summing up the results of quantitative research could exclude certain groups, which highlighted the crucial and important factors that determine the social risk problematic adolescent participation in cyberspace expression, behavior and awareness. The main factors are:

**Family:** The results revealed that children who live with grandparents or with one parent are more active users of online social networks than other children. The results highlight the importance of the role of adult control, children who live with both parents and / or guardians and children from large families tend to adequately assess the benefits of social networking, they are not dependent on the Internet, possibly related to their more free time, more frequent parent adult control. Children living with the grandparents and with one of the parent are usually not controlled; they are free of restrictions in the house, planning their leisure time. As can be seen, adult control or lack thereof affects

disadvantaged teen participation in the resolution of social networks and their frequency. This clearly shows that parents physical and psychological closeness reduce potential threats to becoming victims of online teens and harmful use of the Internet.

**Gender:** In terms of gender it was found that girls are relatively more underlying danger in cyberspace than boys. Perhaps the boys getting harder to understand and recognize potential dangers in the Internet than girls, which are more sensitive and emotional, they carefully evaluate what is dangerous. However, girls tend to give more information about themselves than boys. This may lead to their desire, the need to make new friends, expand the circle of love, by nature women are more social than men.

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